

WISBECH RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL.

Annual Report of Medical Officer of Health for 1902.

To the Chairman and Members of the Rural District Council of Wisbech.

GENTLEMEN—

I beg to present to you my 29th Annual Report, altered and extended similar to last year in obedience to a Memorandum from the Local Government Board.

If, in the following Report, I refer to conditions of the District well-known to you all, and apparently unnecessary to mention, it should be remembered that these Reports are for the information of the Local Government Board and of the County Council as well as of your Council, and that a statement of the local circumstances and a history of local sanitary questions, which may seem superfluous to you, may often be needed by the former bodies.

As you are aware, the old combined District of Wisbech was divided into the Rural Districts of Wisbech and Marshland on the passing of the Local Government Act of 1894 in order that each should be within its County's limits, and consequently I am unable to go further back than 1895 with the Statistics required in the New Tables I. and II.

The following is my report for 1902 :—

The DISTRICT consists of eight parishes in the Isle of Ely, situated to the North, South and West of Wisbech, and has the general characteristic of Fen country geology, viz :—A deposition of peat and silt on sand and gravel, which in turn rest on boulder clay. The configuration of the district is distinctly flat—no part rising many feet above sea-level. It is essentially rural in character, the density of population being one person to about every five acres. The only occupation followed is agriculture, which has now for many years been in a depressed condition.

VITAL STATISTICS.—Tables of Statistics are appended hereto, viz :—The new tables I. to IV. required by the Local Government Board.

POPULATION.—The corrected figures of the last Census are now to hand, and it will be observed that there has been a satisfactory increase in Leverington, a slight one in Elm, and a serious decrease in Upwell. I have estimated the population for the year on the Registrar-General's assumption that the rates of increase or decrease which obtained in the last intercensal period will continue in this one, and the following rates are calculated on that estimated population.

BIRTHS.—229 births were registered, as compared with 245 in 1901, of these 119 were males and 110 females. The birth-rate was 26·3 per 10,00, and the natural increase, *i.e.*, the excess of births over deaths, 127.

DEATHS.—102 deaths were registered, giving a crude death-rate of 11·7 per 1000. This is 2·1 below the average of the last seven years.

AGE MORTALITY.—39 children under 5 years of age and 54 old people over 65 years died during the year. These figures show the mortality at the extremes of life, and were respectively 40 and 31 in 1901.

THE INFANT DEATH RATE.—26 infants under 1 year of age died (as compared with 30 in 1901) giving a death-rate of 113·5 per 1000 registered births, and 3 per 1000 living.

ZYMOTIC DEATHS.—10 deaths (as compared with 6 in 1901) were registered as occurring from the seven principal Zymotic Diseases, viz.:—(1) Small Pox ; (2) Scarlet Fever ; (3) Diphtheria ; (4) Fevers—including Typhus, Enteric or Typhoid, and other continued Fevers ; (5) Measles ; (6) Whooping Cough ; and (7) Diarrhœa.

THE ZYMOTIC DEATH RATE derived from the above mentioned diseases was 1·1 per 1000 as compared with ·69 per 1000 in 1901.

NOTIFIABLE ZYMOTIC DISEASES.

The Diseases notified in the District are those enumerated in the Infectious Disease (Notification) Act, 1889, viz.: Small Pox, Cholera, Diphtheria, Membranous Croup, Erysipelas, the disease known as Scarlatina or Scarlet Fever, and the Fevers known by any of the following names:—Typhus, Typhoid, Enteric, Relapsing; Continued or Puerperal, and Plague. To this list you have recently added Chicken Pox, owing to the prevalence of Small Pox in the Country, and the similarity between the diseases, when the latter is modified by Vaccination. The Act has been in force since September, 1897.

SCARLET FEVER.—19 cases were notified as compared with 54 in 1901. The disease was of a mild type, and none of the cases proved fatal.

DIPHTHERIA AND MEMBRANOUS CROUP.—5 cases were notified as compared with 12 in 1901. One case proved fatal.

ENTERIC FEVER.—2 cases were notified and both recovered.

ERYSIPELAS.—One non-fatal case was notified.

CHICKEN POX.—Eleven cases were notified, and one in the Elm district proved fatal ; the case was complicated with Stomatitis and Asthenia.

ISOLATION.—None of the cases were isolated in Hospital, though there is available the Isolation Hospital of the combined Districts of Walsoken Local Board, Wisbech Urban, Marshland Rural and your District, which contains 14 beds, and admission to which is practically free, as it ought to be, for removal to Hospital of infectious cases is done more for the public benefit than in the individual patient's interest.

DISINFECTION.—The houses of all notified cases are visited by the Inspector, disinfectants freely distributed, and on recovery or death the house is disinfected by the Inspector.

NON-NOTIFIABLE ZYMOTIC DISEASES.

MEASLES was present in the Upwell District and two cases proved fatal.

WHOOPING COUGH was present in each of the three Districts and seven cases proved fatal.

DIARRHŒA.—No death occurred from this disease. I have generally found during the last thirty years that in a wet summer and autumn, diarrhœa and its ally—Enteric Fever—are scarcely if at all prevalent, and that they apparently need a hot dry summer to make their presence felt. It is therefore not surprising to find the past year was comparatively free from those diseases. It should however be borne in mind that diarrhœa is a disease of epidemic character, occurring chiefly in hot weather, and its principal victims are hand-fed infants and old people. Therefore all milk for hand-fed infants should be boiled, and then covered over to protect it from contamination by dust ; it is also important that mothers should avoid, as far as possible, weaning their babies in the summer months, to prevent the risk of their contracting the disease.

OTHER DISEASES.

CANCER.—7 deaths were registered, or about the average of the last few years. It is to be hoped that the numerous researches into the cause and prevention of this terrible disease may bear good fruit in the immediate future.

PHTHISIS or Consumption caused only two deaths as compared with five in 1901. This is a disease which there is every hope may be prevented and cured by isolation and treatment in specially constructed sanatoria and under—as far as we know them—perfect sanitary conditions. This treatment so far in this country has met with a fair amount of success.

For the sake of comparison I give the rates for Rural England and Wales, which have been compiled provisionally by the Registrar-General :—Birth-rate, 27·4 ; Death-rate, 15·3 ; Zymotic Death-rate, 1·14 ; and Infant Mortality 119.

GENERAL.

THE WATER SUPPLY.—A small number of the inhabitants derive their supply from the town mains, the water of which is obtained from the chalk formation ; it is excellent in quality and abundant in quantity, being on the constant system. The vast majority of the people however have to depend on rain water for their domestic supply, as the sub-soil is grossly polluted by the necessary agricultural operations and in places is even brackish. The rain-fall is collected in water-tight underground cisterns safe-guarded as far as possible from contamination.

THE SEWERAGE OF THE DISTRICT.—There is no system of Sewage Disposal, the houses for the most part being drained to cesspools. Some however still drain into the nearest dyke, but these are gradually being remedied. The excrement disposal is by means of deep privy middens, one of the most frequent sources of nuisance in the District and which I have for many years now advocated should be converted into pail closets. There is no public scavenging, the house refuse being applied to their gardens by the occupiers.

WORK DONE.

117 visits of inspection were made during the year by the Inspector. This represents the abatement of many nuisances without formal notice, and in addition 5 nuisances were abated on orders from the Council. Certificates were granted for the occupation of thirty-seven new houses, and three orders were made for the reconstruction of dilapidated privies.

THE DAIRIES AND COW-SHEDS, as well as the SLAUGHTER HOUSES in the District have been inspected by the Inspector and myself and generally found in a clean and satisfactory condition.

THE FACTORY AND WORKSHOP ACT 1901.

This Act came into force on January 1st, 1902, and requires me to report specifically on the administration of the Act in “Workshops” and “Workplaces,” and send a copy of the Report to the Secretary of State. Unfortunately for the Wisbech Rural District the staple industry is agriculture, and in the adjacent towns it is chiefly connected with the timber trade, and the making of agricultural implements, industries which do not put out “home work,” and as regards “Workshops” and “Workplaces” I do not know of any, other than the small village Bakehouses, Blacksmiths’ and Carpenters’ shops, all of which are kept in a fairly good sanitary state.

Finally I have made systematic inspection of the District in company with the Inspector, besides attending to any complaints received and frequent inspections made when on my professional rounds.

I have the honour to be, Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

EDWARD C. BURY, M.D.,

Medical Officer of Health.

